

FIRST SIGHTING OF THE SPOTTED REDSHANK *Tringa erythropus* IN AUSTRALIA

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Introduction

Larger than usual numbers of waders visited the Darwin area during the 1983/84 summer. Exceptional numbers were recorded for the less common species such as Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus*, Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*, and Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*. Varieties observed included Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*, Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos*, Pin-tailed Snipe *Gallinago stenura*, Redshanks *Tringa totanus*, the first record for Northern Territory of Bairds Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* (McKean, in press 1984), and the first reported sighting of the Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* in Australia, which is the subject of this note.

The Spotted Redshank breeds in the northern Palearctic from Scandinavia to far eastern U.S.S.R., migrating south to 'winter' in Africa. South and Southeast Asia to the Malay Peninsula (Medway and Wells, 1976). It occasionally occurs further east, (e.g. at least thirteen sight records from Borneo; Smythies, 1981) and recently (August 1983) a single bird was seen on Halmahera, Moluccas (Peter Kaestner, pers. comm.). It is, perhaps, surprising that this species has not previously been recorded in Australia.

Field Notes

On 16 November 1983, at 0615 hours we were watching waders at Darwin, N.T. McKean's attention was drawn to a wader flying in from the sea uttering a whistled 'chu-eet, chu-eet'. Although McKean had heard Spotted Redshanks previously in Hong Kong he could not immediately identify the call but knew that it was not that of a wader normally found in the Northern Territory. In flight the bird appeared about the size of a Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* with a similar white rump patch extending in a wedge up the back. The upper surface of the wings were plain except for some lighter mottled areas on the wing coverts and the bird lacked any indication of a wing stripe.

The bird landed in front of us, but with the sun directly behind it viewing conditions, despite the use of a 20X telescope, were not optimal. The following identification points were noted. The bill was long, straight and dark but paler at the base. It was proportionally longer than that of a Redshank. The legs were also longer than those of a Redshank but the poor light prevented us from being sure of their true colour. We thought they could have been blackish red. A noticeable white superciliary stripe was present, throat white; well marked brown grey pectoral gorget; belly and rump white; tail end dark, and dorsal plumage brown grey exactly the shade of the bird in figure 3 of plate 50 in Cramp *et al.* (1983). When the bird lifted its wing the underwing coverts were seen to be whitish.

The bird appeared very nervous and vanished while we were clambering down the rocky cliff for a closer view. At 1530 hours on the same day McKean revisited the area and heard the bird call from behind some rocks. He did not disturb the bird as other observers had been notified and he hoped they would see it later on. The bird

was seen again by McKean, briefly between rain squalls at 0715 hours the following day and the legs were noted to be orange and the dark end of the tail was seen to actually consist of barring. The Spotted Redshank has not been seen subsequently.

References

- CRAMP, S. *et al.* (1983) Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Vol. 3, 913 pp. Oxford Univ. Press: London.
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